

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS**

**MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

LAOTIAN SECRET WAR EXHIBIT

INFORMANT: CHANMY LAKONGPHENG

INTERVIEWER: SARAH MORRISON

TRANSLATOR: PINKHAM BOUASRI

DATE: JANUARY 21, 2008

S = SARAH

T = TRANSLATOR

Tape 08.06

Note: "T" will be used to denote Translator's voice, translating the questions asked of and the responses from the informant.

S: Okay. This is Sarah Morrison interviewing Chanmy Lakongpheng on January 21, 2008, along with (--)

T: Pinkham Bouasri.

S: As translator. Chanmy, where and when were your born?

T: Born in [Bassam], Province [Baou], Vientiane, that's the name of the state.

S: In what year? Oh, what's her birthday I guess I should say?

T: February 2, 1938. [Repeats]

S: Okay. And what town did you say she was from?

T: [Boau].

S: [Boau], okay. Did she move around or stay in the same area growing up?

T: Stayed in the same area.

S: The same area? Did she go to school?

T: No.

S: No? Never?

T: Never. No never, she never goes to school. Before we never go to school. We just work. We do the rice field, farming, and do the thing, you know, knitting.

S: Oh yah, around the house things.

T: Weaving, weaving around the house things, yah.

S: Okay. What did her parents do for work then?

T: Farming.

S: All right, rice farmers. And what are her parents' names?

T: The father's name is [Sing]. Mother's name is [Saopou].

S: Okay. Did she remember her grandparents at all? Does she remember, does she know their names at least?

T: No, she doesn't remember.

S: No, not on either side? Okay, so she probably doesn't remember her great grandparents, right?

T: She just remember her own family.

S: Okay. Does she know, does she know what her grandparents did for work?

T: Farmer in the rice field. Farming and weaving.

S: Was the property she grew up on, was it passed down from her grandparents?

T: Yes, it was passed on from the [ages].

S: Um, okay. Does she have any siblings?

T: She has five siblings, one passed away. They have four together now.

S: Did they pass away when they were a child, or recent, more recently?

T: Her older brother that passed away. She has two sisters left.

S: Two sisters left? Okay. But when she grew up there were five total when they were children?

T: Umhm.

S: Okay. Where was she in the family? Was she in the middle? Could she just kind of go down the line of the names?

T: She's the fourth child.

S: The fourth?

T: Yah, the fourth.

S: Okay. Could she just talk a little bit about what her childhood was like?

T: She live like normal kids. No work. Help her parents to work around the house. She has to go find some food. You know, go like catch fish, something like that.

S: Oh really. Did her mother teach her how to run a household, to cook and things of that nature?

T: Yes. Her mom told her you know, what she needs to do.

S: Her and the other sisters of hers?

T: Yes, everybody.

S: Everybody, even the boys too?

T: And her oldest sister teach her too.

S: Hm, okay. What did she used to do for fun? Did she have any activities, hang out with friends at all, or?

T: Yes she did. She hang out with her friends, go here and there for fun.

S: In the village?

T: Yes, in the village.

S: What was her first job?

T: Weaving, weaving in the rice farm.

S: Umhm. Did she make money from that, or did she just, she did it to help her family?

T: Do just for the family.

S: For the family. Did she ever work outside of the home?

T: No.

S: Was there a specific reason why? Was it just the culture?

T: [Laughs] It was the culture. Since we were born we were taught to be like, I mean doing that. You know, we didn't go to work outside the house.

S: Okay. Did she belong to a political party, or is that an option for women?

T: When she goes, she only goes with her husband. And then many people tell her to do stuff, do this and that, she just do it, just go along with her husband.

S: Okay. So what did she do? Did she go, well you said she didn't go to school, right?
(T: Umhm) And then she helped our around the house. So when did she, when and how did she meet her husband I guess? And how old was she?

T: She's not able to answer. She doesn't remember.

S: Oh, okay.

T: So just go with his story.

S: Okay. The only thing I need to know from her about the war time is what she remembers from that time, and what life was like if she can recall?

T: During the war, when her husband went to war and she stayed home just you know, weaving and take care of the family.

S: So she didn't experience any (--) Did she experience any bombing around where she was, and where was she at that time?

T: No.

S: Did she hear anything, or know anybody?

T: No.

S: No? Okay. I guess if she wants she can share. Well you can ask her if there's anything else she, she wants to say about that time, about the Vietnam War going on. If there's anything she wants to say.

T: No, she doesn't have any idea, or she doesn't remember what happened back then.

S: Does she want to share how they came from Laos to America? Does she remember that?

T: She just remember going along with the husband.

S: Okay. Is there anything, is there anything she wants to share though? I mean special experiences, or anything she has at all from her life over there that she remembers?

T: [Laughs] She just follows her husband everywhere he goes. She just follows him, because he took care of everything for her. Just go along with him.

S: But she took care of the son though, right, while he was in the military?

T: She took care of her son. Took care of her son and everything.

S: So what was it like to take care of him if her husband was off fighting?

T: Yah, it's hard to take care of the kid by herself, but she had to do it and be patient.

S: How many years was that? I can look at his if I have to.

T: She doesn't remember. It's a long time. Until he come back, until the father came back.

S: Okay. I guess the only other thing I have is about the Secret War since that's what the exhibit is about. Does she, does she realize (--) Well she says she doesn't remember what happened over there, but does she realize that there are bombs still over there that are detonated on a daily basis. And how does she feel about that? There are innocent people getting hurt.

T: She doesn't know.

S: She doesn't have any feelings on it?

T: She doesn't remember, even though people are [stunned] you know, she's hearing people talk about it but she doesn't remember what happened.

S: But she, okay, but she knows that it's still happening, right? I mean not bombing, but you know.

T: No.

S: Does she want to talk as a final thing about her life here in Lowell at all, and the Laos Community?

T: Everything is normal. You know, just live like normal people, you know.

S: Is she happy?

T: Yes, she's happy. This is a better life than when they were living in Laos over here.

S: Is she, does she think that the Laos community is good the way it is now, or that it can be strengthened in any way, or you know, bring them together more in any way? I mean how does she feel about the well, the population I guess in Lowell?

T: I don't understand how to answer it.

S: Um, let me see if I can ask it better, and if not, don't worry about it. I guess Ali has talked about the Laos community, and we've talked about different people. There's only what, about 5,000 people here in Lowell from Laotian descent. And does she feel a part of the community? Does she feel that the community is strong, or that yah, I guess that's my question?

T: Yes, she is like, be part of the community. Like if their community is doing something then she will go and you know, be supportive. Things like that.

S: Okay. Is there anything else she wants to say?

T: No, nothing.

S: Okay, thank you!

T: Okay.

Interview ends